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Writers Suggest U.S. Involvement In Death Of The Rev. Carney

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WASHINGTON — An article in a current issue of "The Nation" concludes that there are "strong suggestions" that U.S. military and intelligence personnel "may have been present" when the Rev. James Francis Carney died in Honduras last September.

The magazine article also charges that there is "compelling evidence" that U.S. officials played along with an elaborate Honduran cover-up of the facts of the death of the Jesuit priest from St. Louis.

A State Department spokesman said that the department would not comment on the article until it has studied the allegations. In the past, the department has said that U.S. forces were not in the vicinity of the Honduran military operation in which Carney apparently died.

Carney, known to Honduran peasants as "Father Guadalupe," had been a thorn in the side of the Honduran government during nearly two decades in the country. The government expelled him in 1979. In 1983 he re-entered Honduras with a small band of about 100 guerrillas.

The Honduran government announced last September 19 that its armed forces had eliminated the guerrilla force that was operating near the Nicaraguan border. Honduran officials claimed that about 10 of the guerrillas, including Carney, had been cut off from their food supply and starved.

Members of Carney's family went to Honduras to investigate the disappearance. After the visit, Carney's brother-in-law, Joseph Connolly of Clayton, said he suspected that the U.S. had been involved in the matter.

The authors of The Nation article

said their investigation showed that Connolly's fears were "well-founded." The authors are George Black, who has written books on Central America and Anne Nelson, who has written about Central America for the Los Angeles Times.

The authors cited these pieces of evidence:

— The State Department admitted in a Dec. 7 letter to the Carney family that the U.S. Defense attache in Honduras assisted in debriefing guerrillas captured in the operation in which Carney died. The authors ask how these interrogations could have failed to elicit the fact that Carney was among the guerrillas. Yet the U.S. has said it did not know of Carney's presence among the guerrillas until the Sept. 19 press conference after the operation was over.

— Five U.S. helicopters transported 50 Honduran soldiers to a location in Honduras on Sept. 9. The State Department has said that the soldiers were 150 kilometers away from Carney and the guerrillas. But the article quotes an unidentified senior Honduran military officer who said the U.S. had played a command and control role in the fighting. This would violate Congressional constraints on the U.S. role in Honduras.

— Six captured guerrillas who were eyewitnesses to the events involving Carney were killed before the Carney family could talk to them. The Carneys received a letter last Nov. 11 from the Honduran general in charge of the operation who said the six were killed trying to escape on Oct. 3, 1983.

— One of the six dead eyewitnesses allegedly had told his family earlier that two North American advisers had been involved in torturing and interrogating Carney. The family

passed this information on to the Christian Human Rights Commission of Honduras which released it last October at a press conference in Mexico City.

The group claimed that the guerrilla had identified "North American advisers Lt. West Blank and Maj. Mark Kelvi" as having been "directly involved in the torture and interrogation" which led to Carney's death in a secret underground cell of a fort at El Aguacate. This fort was allegedly used by the CIA to supply the "contras" who are fighting the Nicaraguan government.

— A pilot who was supplying the contras before being captured by the Nicaraguan government, said at a press conference last fall that there was a CIA Agent at El Aguacate known as West whose second in command was named Mark. The article said this confirmed some of the facts in the dead eyewitness's account.